

SEARCH

DATE: 8/20/10 10:19AM

## Houston Clergy Join Protest Against Perry's Prayer Event

By: Secular Coalition for America

A growing number of local and national civil rights organizations have joined the protest against Texas Gov. Rick Perry's extremist-sponsored religious prayer event at the Houston prayer gathering, since SCA first criticized the event two weeks ago.

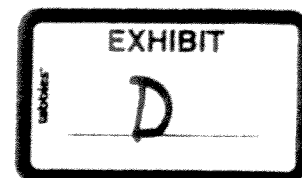
Echoing SCA's position that it's totally inappropriate for an elected official to promote divisive religious messages while teaming up with an identified "hate group" such as the American Family Association, organizations including the Southern Poverty Law Center, American Atheists, the Interfaith Alliance, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, the Houston GLBT Political Caucus, and the Council on American-Islamic Relations have all issued statements condemning Perry's role in the event.

But it's not just the "usual suspects" promoting church-state separation who have a problem with Perry's actions. Last week, more than 20 clergy members from the Houston area penned a must-read editorial http://www.scpa.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/letter\_to\_the\_houston\_chronicle.pdf, explaining their "deep concern" over the event.

*We believe in a healthy boundary between church and state. Out of respect for the state, we believe that it should represent all citizens equally and without preference for religious or philosophical tradition. Out of respect for religious communities, we believe that they should foster faithful ways of living without favoring one political party over another. Keeping the church and state separate allows each to thrive and upholds our proud national tradition of empowering citizens to worship freely and vote conscientiously. We are concerned that our governor has crossed the line by organizing a religious event rather than focusing on the people's business in Austin.*

*We also express concern that the day of prayer and fasting at Reliant Stadium is not an inclusive event. As clergy leaders in the nation's fourth-largest city, we take pride in Houston's vibrant and diverse religious landscape. Our religious communities include Bahais, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Unitarian-Universalists, and many other faith traditions. Our city is also home to committed agnostics and atheists, with whom we share common cause as fellow Houstonians. Houston has long been known as a live-and-let-live city where all are respected and welcomed. It troubles us that the governor's prayer event is not open to everyone. In the publicized materials the governor has made it clear that only Christians of a particular kind are welcome to pray in a certain way. We feel that such an exclusive event does not reflect the rich tapestry of our city.*

Leading a group of Christian and Unitarian-Universalist ministers offer such a poignant defense of secular government and warmly refer to agnostics and atheists as their fellow Houstonians. It's a truly great reminder that it takes all of us, not just the religious people who support keeping church and state separate. We've received more than a few requests from people who want to know how to get involved in the protest. We're happy to help and will be working to get as many people as possible involved in the protest.



As the authors of the editorial point out, secular government is in many ways what allows religious faith to flourish. Providing freedom of and from religion is the only way to ensure that everyone is able to practice, or not practice, their own beliefs freely – and the best way to preserve those freedoms is a secular government that gives no privilege to one worldview over another.

When a U.S. governor, on the other hand, declares one theistic view as the only solution, we must come together and call upon Jesus to guide us through unprecedented struggles – and insists that all Americans should embrace his religion as the only solution, those freedoms become threatened, for believers and nonbelievers alike.

Rick Perry might not fully appreciate the purpose of secularism, but those Houston clergy members sure do.

We ask that Gov. Perry leave the ministry to us," they wrote, "and refocus his energy on the work of governing our state."

Is there a secular word for "amen"?

*Correction: This post originally referred to the op-ed's authors only as Christian clergy when, in fact, many of them were also Unitarian Universalists. The post has been updated to reflect those changes.*

## Comments

Commented by Ronald Martin (<http://sites.google.com/site/sic/nro/>) that working on 12/15/11 15:13:15

Interesting. But we do understand that the theist clergy is seemingly only correct in this instance and is not a reliable source of referencing legitimacy of church and state issues. Do we know the motives of these ministers - maybe they would prefer the day of prayer to be held in their churches for some reason that may benefit the church that could not be actuated at the stadium venue - is that possible??? Suppose the Governor conceded to the churches and compromises with them on this issue - would the churches stand to gain anything?

Is there a secular word for "amen"? Ummm... maybe "hey-men"??

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## Gov. Perry's call to prayer doesn't foster 'unity'

By Charles C. Haynes

Published 12:01 a.m. Thursday, June 23, 2011

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VIEWPOINT: Avoiding taxes the way big corporations do it  
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With Texas Gov. [Rick Perry](#) poised to run for president, it may be a good time to ask what his recent call for a "day of fasting and prayer" tells us about how he would govern the nation.

Unlike past "prayer proclamations" by elected officials — a staple of political life for much of our history — Perry's prayer plan includes an evangelical Christian revival meeting to be held in a Houston stadium on Aug. 6.

Advertised as a "non-denominational, apolitical, Christian prayer meeting," Perry's rally is being organized and funded by the [American Family Association](#), a

conservative Christian advocacy group perhaps best known for its strong opposition to gay rights.

The governor is not merely participating in the day-long prayer event. He's listed on the AFA website as "the initiator" — and appears first on the roster of prayer-day "leaders."

In his official "call to prayer," Perry appears to invite everyone, asking "fellow Texans" to join him at the stadium to fast and pray for "unity and righteousness." But on the event's website, the governor makes it clear that the gathering is really for those who pray in the name of Jesus:

"As a nation we must come together and call upon Jesus to guide us through unprecedented struggles, and thank Him for the blessings of freedom."

What Perry hasn't explain is how organizing a government-led, Christian-only prayer event will serve to create "unity" in what is now the most religiously diverse society on earth.

Perry has also invited his fellow governors to join him at the stadium on Aug. 6. But just as all Texans aren't evangelical Christians, neither do all governors share Perry's brand of Christianity.

Of course, Rick Perry, like every American, is free to pray and worship as his conscience dictates. Throughout our history, many elected officials have been highly visible participants in their religious communities (think President [Jimmy Carter](#) teaching Sunday Bible classes).

But Perry's prayer plan is something new and different. As one critic of Perry's prayer call, [Barry Lynn](#) of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, told [The New York Times](#):

"I have followed religion and politics closely for 35 years, and I have never seen a governor initiate and lead this kind of Christians-only prayer rally."

Perry's proclamation, at least, is constitutional under current law. The courts have thus far held that elected officials may proclaim such oft-challenged days of prayer and fasting — as long as the proclamations are mere acknowledgements of the place of prayer in many people's lives, and not state mandates.

But even if Gov. Perry's prayer proclamation is legal, what message does he send to the millions of Americans of other faiths — and those with no religious affiliation — when, as governor, he initiates and leads a Christian prayer rally for "national unity"? It raises questions about how much minority religions can rely on him to protect their rights — and treat their beliefs with fairness and respect.

Far from uniting Americans, this mixture of religion and politics is a recipe for conflict and division. That's why [Thomas Jefferson](#) insisted on separating church from state, and why, as president, he resisted pressure to declare days of fasting and prayer.

"Fasting and prayer are religious exercises," Jefferson wrote. "Every religious society has a right to determine for itself the times for these exercises, and the objects proper for them, according to their own particular tenets; and this right can never be safer than in their own hands, where the Constitution has deposited it."

Perry's prayer rally may prove popular with conservative Christian primary voters, but that doesn't make it wise or right.

Charles C. Haynes is director of the Religious Freedom Education Project at the [Newseum](#) in Washington, D.C.

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News Desk, Religion

## Perry invites governors to prayer meeting

Written by Editorial Staff  
June 6, 6:26 PM



(Rick Perry - Associated Press Photo by Jack Plunkett)

Texas Gov. Rick Perry has invited the nation's governors to join him in a day of prayer to seek God's guidance to deal with the problems facing America.

The day of prayer and fasting is planned for Aug. 6 in Houston and is sponsored by the American Family Association. The organization's website says the event is intended to be a non-denominational, apolitical, Christian prayer service.

Perry's invitation comes on the heels of his announcement that he is considering a run for president

"Given the trials that beset our nation and world, from the global economic downturn to natural disasters, the lingering danger of terrorism and continued debasement of our culture, I believe it is time to convene the leaders from each of our United States in a day of prayer and fasting, like that described in the book of Joel," Perry said in a statement.

Titled, "The Response," the event is scheduled to take place at Reliant Stadium. On the website dedicated to the event, organizers said "America is in the midst of a historic crisis."

"We want the presence, power, and person of Christ to fill our nation and turn the hearts of millions to righteousness, peace, and joy in Him," the group's website gives as a mission statement. "We want to see real change across our nation that only our God can perform."

In his invitation to the other 49 governors, he urged them to also proclaim Aug. 6 a day to pray for "unity and righteousness."

"We simply want to humbly ask our creator to intervene on behalf of our people and nation, and ask for His blessing and healing power to transform our lives," Perry said in the letter.

Michigan's Gov. Rick Snyder has already said he won't be attending. The Republican governor said his schedule was too busy.

The Secular Coalition for America issued a statement urging governors not to attend the event.

"The last thing our officials should do in times of national struggle is promote a divisive religious event that proposes no real solutions to our country's real-world problems," said Sean Faircloth, executive director of the lobbying organization for secular and nontheistic Americans. "We urge all elected officials to reject Gov. Perry's invitation to attend this explicitly Christian platform for theocratic grandstanding that does nothing to offer substantive solutions to our country's problems."

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

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# POLITICALLY INCLINED

## Perry's prayer 'response' a clear publicity stunt

10 Jun



After toying with the media and his constituents for months, Rick Perry has dipped his toes in the waters of the 2012 presidential race. And just like every other candidate on the grocery list of staunch conservatives that have put down their name for consideration, he's sold himself to the evangelical Christian right. This is common and expected, but Perry's national day of prayer is the most overt, and frankly disturbing, attempt at attracting this audience I've ever seen.

Not only does this fly in the face of separation of church and state, it only serves to more deeply divide a people that is already so deeply divided that Texas can't decide whether to fund its public schools and the national Congress is arguing over whether to let our country default on its debt.

The national day of prayer, dubbed "[The Response: A Call to Prayer for a Nation in Crisis](#)," is being bankrolled by the American Family Association, which the Southern Poverty Law Center has long listed as a hate group for their blatant anti-gay bigotry. But don't worry, anti-gay isn't the only thing they are down for. Don Edmund, president of that organization, was appropriately labeled an anti-Semite by both the president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the leader of the Atlanta office of the Anti-Defamation League in the late 80s after Edmund said that Jews controlled the television and movie industry and purposefully filled movies and TV shows with anti-Christian messages.

The event also lists sponsors from the [International House of Prayer](#) and [Lou Engle's The Call](#), which "played an active role in supporting anti-gay sentiment in Uganda, where legislation under potential consideration would make homosexuality a crime punishable by death in some circumstances."

That's the crack team of sponsors, Perry.

The event is also only Christian in nature. In his statement on the website, Perry says, "As a nation, we must come together and call upon God to guide us through unprecedented struggles, and thank Him for the blessings of freedom we so richly enjoy."

Right, Perry. We must "come together" - but only if we are straight and Christian. Since about 22 percent of that "nation" you speak of is not Christian, and about 9 million Americans identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender, Rick Perry has left out a large chunk of the United States on this day of "unity."

In an interview with the Houston Chronicle, Tim Wildman of the American Family Association acknowledged that one of the goals for the event was to pray for an end to the "debasement of our culture" - referring to the increasing acceptance of homosexuality in society. But yes, let's "come together."

The gathering is based on the Book of Joel, in which people were punished by God with locusts and drought for living a hedonistic lifestyle. The people then came together with offerings and prayer, and God rid them of their punishment.

So what's the problem with Perry's little theory about our new gathering of prayer? Our current problems, like the terrorism Perry mentions on his homepage, are largely caused by cultural misunderstandings and an inability to work together to solve obvious problems that face our country. And Perry's straight, Christian gathering will only cause more of that division and further cultural misunderstandings - especially given the group he has chosen to ally himself with.

I mean, honestly. What are you doing here, Perry? If you wanted to hold a day of prayer, was there not a less anti-gay, anti-Semitic Christian group you could have done it with? I can name five off the top of my head that would be less controversial than this one.

For a Republican who prides himself on understanding the long term, this is a very short sighted and naive venture. But maybe his long term has nothing to do with unity or cultural understanding, and has everything to do with winning the presidency on the backs of the thousands of devout Christians that will flock to this event and then flock to the polls next November to vote straight ticket Republican.

What happened to presidents who valued the idea of separation of church and state? What happened to presidents who felt it inappropriate to throw their religion in the faces of those that may not agree with him?

What I really want out of presidents is what John F. Kennedy said in his speech before he was accepted as the first Catholic president:

"I believe in a president whose views on religion are his own private affair, neither imposed upon him by the nation, nor imposed by the nation upon him as a condition to holding that office."

Instead, for whatever reason, the United States has descended into a nation that, instead of taking pride in its "melting pot history," only accepts those that happen to pray to the Christian god and sleep with someone of the opposite sex.

Congratulations, Perry. This event might win you the Republican nomination or get you close to it, but it will only further divide a nation whose division is leading to all of the problems you claim to be fixable by prayer. And if, God help us, you take office in January of 2013, America better be prepared to pray all over again - to whatever God they choose and with whatever partner they happen to share their lives with.

2 Votes

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One blogger was his best



#### 4 Responses to "Perry's prayer 'response' a clear publicity stunt"

1




[m.remison](#) June 11, 2011 at 12:02 am #  
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This isn't remotely Christian, and it frustrates me as one. Just as our society shouldn't stand for this political pandering, the "church" shouldn't be easily co-opted by it. Jesus didn't "judge" those that disagreed with him, neither should his followers.

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### Perry promotes Aug. 6 'Day of Prayer' in new Web video

By Michael O'Brien - 07/11/11 04:51 PM ET

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Texas Gov. Rick Perry (R) is "inviting you to join your fellow Americans in a day of prayer and fasting" in a new Web video released Monday.

Perry launched a **website** and accompanying video to promote the National Day of Prayer he's organized for Aug. 6 at Reliant Stadium in Houston.

"As an elected leader, I'm all too aware of government's limitations when it comes to fixing things that are spiritual in nature. That's where prayer comes in," Perry said in the video. "With the economy in trouble, communities in crisis, and people adrift in a sea of moral relativism, we need God's help. That's why I'm calling on Americans to pray and fast, like Jesus did, and as God called the Israelites to do in the Book of Joel."

It's hard not to look at Perry's video and Day of Prayer through a political lens, though his office has strongly maintained it's a nonpolitical gathering. While Perry makes no explicit political comment, the message could very well resonate with socially conservative voters who participate in Republican presidential primaries.

The video comes amid indications that Perry has also stepped up his outreach





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# Front Row Washington

Tracking U.S. politics

JUN 5, 2011 23:33 EDT

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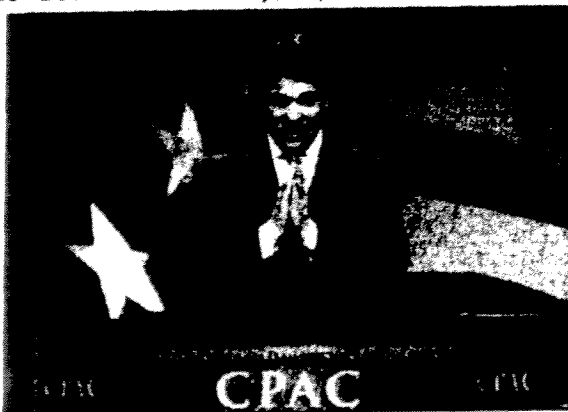
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2012 PRESIDENTIAL RACE | AMERICAN FAMILY ASSOCIATION | RICK PERRY | TEXAS GOVERNOR | U.S. POLITICS

Financial debt. Terrorism. Natural disasters — all big problems for the United States.

Texas Governor Rick Perry, a potential Republican presidential candidate, thinks prayer might



help

"There is hope for America... and we will find it on our knees," Perry says in an invitation to fellow Americans to join him for "a solemn gathering of prayer and fasting" for the country in August in Houston.

"Right now, America is in crisis," Perry says in a message on The Response web site. "We have been besieged by financial debt, terrorism, and a multitude of natural disasters. As a nation, we must come together, and call upon Jesus to guide us through unprecedented struggles."

When Texas was in the middle of a wildfire crisis in April, Perry issued a proclamation calling for three days of prayer for rain days.

The Mississippi-based American Family Association, a conservative Christian activist group, is footing the bill for the prayer gathering. But it was the governor's idea

Eric Bearse, a spokesman for The Response, said on Sunday: "The governor told the American Family Association about a month ago that we need to call Americans together for a time of prayer."

*Photo Credit: REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst (Perry at Conservative Political Action conference, Feb. 2011)*

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## COMMENTS

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JUN 6, 2011  
 12:25 PM EDT

Interesting concept, maybe he can pray away the Texas budget deficit.

Posted by [seattlesh](#) | [Report as abusive](#)

JUN 6, 2011  
 4:13 PM EDT

Time Magazine interview with Einstein in his 50s FYI:

To what extent are you influenced by Christianity? "As a child I received instruction both in the Bible and in the Talmud. I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene."

Do you accept the historical existence of Jesus? "Unquestionably! No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life!"

Secularization of church and state isn't working folks, never will! Also, what we do with our money and our time says everything about us as a country! Honesty is the best policy! Only God!

Posted by [DrJJJJ](#) | [Report as abusive](#)

JUN 5, 2011  
 5:15 PM EDT

This violates the First Amendment. There is no question about it.

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Jesus is a Christian idea, and by stating that, "As a nation, we must come together, and call upon Jesus to guide us through unprecedented struggles," Governor Perry has respected an establishment of a religion. He has made no law yet, but he has issued proclamations. As a non-Christian, this does offend me.

Posted by [Limitin](#) | [Report as abusive](#)

JUN 5, 2011  
 11:10 PM EDT

Rick Perry is about as christian as the average nyena

Posted by [Getplaning](#) | [Report as abusive](#)

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### Opinion


## Gov. Rick Perry's odd call to prayer

Published: Saturday, June 18, 2011; Last Updated: Sat. Jun 18, 2011, 9:42am

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By Charles C. Haynes, guest columnist

With Texas Gov. Rick Perry poised to run for president, it may be a good time to ask what his recent call for a "day of fasting and prayer" tells us about how he would govern the nation.

Unlike past "prayer proclamations" by elected officials -- a staple of political life for much of our history -- Perry's prayer plan includes an evangelical Christian revival meeting to be held in a Houston stadium on Aug. 6.

Advertised as a "non-denominational, apolitical, Christian prayer meeting," Perry's rally is being organized and funded by the American Family Association, a conservative Christian advocacy group perhaps best known for its strong opposition to gay rights.

The governor is not merely participating in the day-long prayer event: He's listed on the AFA website as "the initiator" -- and appears first on the roster of prayer-day "leaders."

In his official "call to prayer" Perry appears to invite everyone, asking "fellow Texans" to join him at the stadium to fast and pray for "unity and righteousness." But on the event's website, the governor makes it clear that the gathering is really for those who pray in the name of Jesus:

"As a nation we must come together and call upon Jesus to guide us through unprecedented struggles, and thank Him for the blessings of freedom."

What Perry doesn't explain is how organizing a governor-led, Christian-only prayer event will serve to create "unity" in what is now the most religiously diverse society on earth.

Perry has also invited his fellow governors to join him at the stadium on Aug. 6. But just as all Texans aren't evangelical Christians, neither do all governors share Perry's brand of Christianity.

Of course, Rick Perry, like every American, is free to pray and worship as his conscience dictates. Throughout our history, many elected officials have been highly visible participants in their religious communities (think President Jimmy Carter teaching Sunday Bible classes).

But Perry's prayer plan is something new and different. As one critic of Perry's prayer call, Barry Lynn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, told The New York Times:  
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### **Comments**

The following are comments from the readers. In no way do they represent the views of pottsmere.com or The Mercury.

stryker wrote on Jun 18, 2011 9:41 AM:

" Interesting, since Perry's presidential chances haven't got a prayer. "

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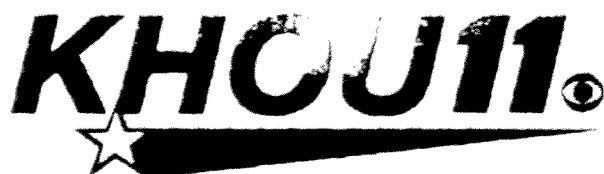
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## **STANDS FOR HOUSTON**

### **Rick Perry invites fellow governors to prayer meeting in Houston**



by Associated Press & Gabe Gutierrez / KHOU 11 News

[khoul.com](http://khoul.com)

Posted on June 6, 2011 at 5:36 PM

Updated Tuesday, Jun 7 at 10:12 AM

Recommend 9

AUSTIN, Texas—Texas Gov. Rick Perry has invited the nation's governors to join him in a prayer day to seek God's guidance to deal with the problems facing America.

The day for prayer and fasting is planned for Aug. 6 in Houston and is sponsored by the American Family Association, a Christian advocacy group. The organization's website says the event is intended to be a non-denominational, apolitical, Christian prayer service.

Perry's invitation comes on the heels of his announcement that he is considering a run for president. He is a strong advocate of the Christian conservative wing of the Republican Party. He has attended numerous Christian events as governor, and was an early adopter of tea party rhetoric.

This invitation, though, has attracted national attention.

"Given the trials that beset our nation and world, from the global economic downturn to natural disasters, the lingering danger of terrorism and continued debasement of our culture, I believe it is time to convene the leaders from each of our United States in a day of prayer and fasting, like that described in the book of Joel," Perry said in a statement.

Titled, "The Response," the event is scheduled to take place at Reliant Stadium. On the website dedicated to the event, organizers said "America is in the midst of a historic crisis."

"We want the presence, power, and person of Christ to fill our nation and turn the hearts of millions to righteousness, peace, and joy in him," the group's website gives as a mission statement. "We want to see real change across our nation that only our God can perform."

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Michigan's Gov. Rick Snyder has already said he won't be attending. The Republican governor said his schedule was too busy.

The Secular Coalition for America issued a statement urging governors not to attend the event.

"The last thing our officials should do in times of national struggle is promote a divisive religious event that proposes no real solutions to our country's real-world problems," said Sean Faircloth, executive director of the lobbying organization for secular and nontheistic Americans. "We urge all elected officials to reject Governor Perry's invitation to attend this explicitly Christian platform for theocratic grandstanding that does nothing to offer substantive solutions to our country's problems."



Others were already planning protests.

"Those people are not going to do anything except preach hate," said Ray Hill, a Houston gay rights activist who's planning to protest the event. "And some of my people will die because of that hate."

The Southern Poverty Law Center has labeled the AFA as an "anti-gay" group, but KHOU 11 News' political analyst said the organization might be instrumental if Perry decides to officially jump into the presidential race.

"He is probably trying to establish himself with a core Republican constituency," Bob Stein said. "And clearly the evangelical and the religious vote is very, very important."

The AFA said Perry had come up with the idea for the event back in December, way before he had said he was considering a bid for the White House.

"This is not a political event," said Eric Bearse, a spokesman for the AFA. "This is about gathering people together—men and women of faith—to simply pray for the country."



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Political Insider (<http://blogs.ajc.com/political-insider-jim-galloway>)

## Nathan Deal says no to Texas prayer event with Rick Perry

1:28 pm June 7, 2011 by jgalloway

On Monday, Gov. Rick Perry of Texas let it be known that he was helping to organize a "prayer and fasting" event in Houston and was inviting the nation's governors to participate.

The Aug. 6 event is called The Response, "a non-denominational, apolitical, Christian prayer meeting" hosted by the American Family Association.

From a letter from Perry posted on the group's website:

"Right now, America is in crisis: we have been besieged by financial debt, terrorism, and a multitude of natural disasters. As a nation, we must come together and call upon Jesus to guide us through unprecedented struggles, and thank Him for the blessings of freedom we so richly enjoy."

Gov. Nathan Deal's office this morning let it be known that he will not be able to attend the event.

Now, let us assume that as governor, Deal is in control of his own calendar and that his decision is a choice. When you are governor, previous engagements do not exist.

Of course, there is the Aug. 15 start of a special session of the Legislature to redraw state House, Senate and congressional districts. But there may be two larger reasons that Deal doesn't feel obliged to fly to Texas.

First, Perry announced late last month that he was giving consideration to entering the Republican race for president. Deal is already pledged to former U.S. House speaker Newt Gingrich.

But there is another, perhaps more influential, reason. The American Family Association — the group working with Perry on the Houston prayer meet — is engaged in a yearlong, bitter confrontation with Atlanta-based Home Depot over the company's alleged promotion of "homosexual activism." Something about orange aprons at Gay Pride events. Only last week, the group presented a petition with nearly 500,000 signatures to Home Depot chairman Frank Blake at a stockholder's meeting.

Home Depot's political action committee gives to both sides of the aisle, but leans Republican. In 2010, according to [opensecrets.com](http://www.opensecrets.com), the Home Depot PAC gave \$10,000 each to PACs run by U.S. Sens. Saxby Chambliss and Johnny Isakson.

Home Depot co-founder Arthur Blank — the 938th richest billionaire in the United States — is a major source of campaign contributions in Georgia. Again, he gives to both sides — but more generously to Republicans. In a six-month period in 2008 and 2009, he donated \$15,000 to the state party. He is likely to give again.

So, no, Governor Deal will not be praying with Rick Perry in August. Not in person, anyway.

By Jim Galloway, Political Insider

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# Swampland

Political Insight from the Beltway and Beyond



RELIGION

## Rick Perry's Controversial Call to Prayer

BY AMY SULLIVAN | 130 COMMENTS

Texas governor Rick Perry, who may or may not be considering a presidential run, is partnering with the conservative Christian American Family Association to hold an all-day prayer event in Houston this August. Perry has invited his fellow governors to join him at the event to "call upon Jesus to guide us through unprecedented struggles" facing the country, including "financial debt, terrorism, and a multitude of natural disasters."

Several groups, including the Interfaith Alliance and the Secular Coalition, have already expressed concern about the "Christians only" nature of the event, as well as Perry's apparent official endorsement of a sectarian prayer gathering. Pundits have speculated about whether governors will feel pressure to show up to Perry's prayer fest or risk being labeled anti-prayer godless secularists. But at least one Republican governor has already made it clear he won't be attending, which may open the door for others to decline. Although who wouldn't want to head to Houston in August?

Summer vacation plans may not be the reason that Georgia Governor Nathan Dean announced through his office that he plans on skipping the prayer gathering. It seems that the American Family Association has been running a year-long boycott against the Atlanta-based Home Depot because the company "has chosen to sponsor and participate in numerous gay pride parades and festivals."

Last week, an AFA official showed up at a Home Depot board meeting with a petition bearing the names of a half million people who say they will not shop at the home store unless it ceases its "homosexual activism." Home Depot's chairman was reportedly unmoved and reiterated the company's commitment to diversity, a response that indicates social attitudes are shifting away from the AFA's stock opposition to homosexuality. But Governor Dean still isn't pleased that the AFA is targeting a major Georgia company (and political contributor).

Other governors haven't yet responded to Perry's invite, but they may want to think twice about that whole "pray about natural disasters" thing. You may remember that back in April, Perry issued a proclamation for days of prayer for rain in response to a horrific drought the state of Texas has experienced. He's not the first governor to respond to weather-related difficulties with state-wide prayer. Governors in Georgia and Alabama have done the same at various point over the past few decades.


And so has the state of South Dakota. In 2004, Republican Governor Mike Rounds proclaimed a state-wide day of prayer to ask for rain for the drought-plagued state. So the people of South Dakota prayed on May 23. And lo, it started to rain. And rain. And rain. For fourteen straight days, it rained. It rained so much that the parched ground couldn't handle all the water. Some areas of the state flooded and Governor Rounds had to call in FEMA to assess the damage.

Just a word of caution, Governor Perry. The power of prayer is not to be trifled with.

**Related Topics:** american family association, prayer, rick perry, texas, Religion

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# chron Viewpoints, Outlook

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## Day of prayer violates separation of church and state

June 16, 2011 8:39PM

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As Houston clergy, we write to express our deep concern over Gov. Rick Perry's proclamation of a day of prayer and fasting at Houston's Reliant Stadium on Aug. 6. In our role as faith leaders, we encourage and support prayer, meditation and spiritual practice. Yet our governor's religious event gives us pause for a number of reasons.

We believe in a healthy boundary between church and state. Out of respect for the state, we believe that it should represent all citizens equally and without preference for religious or philosophical tradition. Out of respect for religious communities, we believe that they should foster faithful ways of living without favoring one political party over another. Keeping the church and state separate allows each to thrive and upholds our proud national tradition of empowering citizens to worship freely and vote conscientiously. We are concerned that our governor has crossed the line by organizing a religious event rather than focusing on the people's business in Austin.

We also express concern that the day of prayer and fasting at Reliant Stadium is not an inclusive event. As clergy leaders in the nation's fourth-largest city, we take pride in Houston's vibrant and diverse religious landscape. Our religious communities include Bahais, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Unitarian Universalists and many other faith traditions. Our city is also home to committed agnostics and atheists, with whom we share common cause as fellow Houstonians. Houston has long been known as a live-and-let-live city where all are respected and welcomed. It troubles us that the governor's prayer event is not open to everyone. In the publicized materials, the governor has made it clear that only Christians of a particular kind are welcome to pray in a certain way. We feel that such an exclusive event does not reflect the rich tapestry of our city. Our deepest concern, however, lies in the fact that funding for this event appears to come from the American Family Association, an organization labeled a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. The American Family Association and its leadership have a long track record of anti-gay speech and have actively worked to discriminate against the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community. The American Family Association and its leadership have also been stridently anti-Muslim, going so far as to question the rights of Muslim-Americans to freely organize and practice their faith. We believe it is inappropriate for our governor to organize a religious event funded by a group known for its discriminatory stances.

As religious leaders, we commit to join with all Houstonians in working to make our city a better place. We will lead our communities in prayer, meditation and spiritual practice. We ask that Gov. Perry leave the ministry to us and refocus his energy on the work of governing our state.

*This article was submitted by Rev. Dr. Jeremy Rutledge, minister, Covenant Church, Alliance of Baptists/American Baptist Churches, Rev. Douglas Anders, conference minister, South Central Conference of the United Church of Christ, Rev. Paul Beedle, Unitarian Universalist, Rev. Dr. Ginny Brown Daniel, minister, Plymouth United Church UCC, Rev. Beth Ellen Cooper-Davis, minister, Northwoods Unitarian Universalist Church, Rev. Michael Diaz, director of connections, Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church, Rev. Pat Farnan, Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church, Rev. Lura Groen, pastor, Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Rev. Teddy Hardy, minister, St. John United Church of Christ, Rev. Lori Keaton, United Church of Christ, Rev. Harry Knox, senior pastor.*

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# **THE RESPONSE:**

*a call to prayer for a nation in crisis*

For Immediate Release  
June 27, 2011

Contact: Eric Bearse  
512-397-3212

**The Response: Answering a Governor's Call for Prayer for our Nation**  
*Spiritual Leaders Organize Solemn Assembly in Houston on Aug 6 in Response to Gov Perry's  
Proclamation for a Day of Prayer and Fasting*

**Austin** – Leaders in the Christian Community, including event organizer the American Family Association, today expressed their great enthusiasm for organizing "the Response": a solemn assembly of prayer and fasting inspired by Chapter 2 of the Book of Joel and scheduled for August 6 in Houston's Reliant Stadium.

"With million of Americans losing their jobs, their homes and hope, we believe as a nation we must fall to our knees and seek God's forgiveness, blessing and provision," said event spokesman Eric Bearse. "Since the founding of our Republic, our nation's leaders have turned to prayer to help guide the nation. Such a time as this requires a spirit of humility, and a willingness to seek Godly solutions to the many challenges that confront us."

Governor Perry issued a proclamation on June 6, 2011 calling on Texans to join together in fasting and prayer for the nation. He invited the nation's other 49 governors to do the same, appealing to people to seek God's provision for our country.

In response to Perry's call for prayer, Christian leaders from across the country have begun organizing a Christian-themed prayer service that will last from 10:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. in Houston. Event leaders are working toward building a program, mobilizing churches and including a diverse array of Christian leaders to speak, pray, and lead praise and worship music. To date, more than 4,500 American have registered to attend on the event website, [www.theresponseusa.com](http://www.theresponseusa.com).

"Our event is open to every American, and we will pray for every American," said Bearse. "We will go to Houston in a spirit of unity, and humble ourselves before the One who paid the price for our sins. Jesus Christ. Anyone is welcome to be a part of this spiritual experience, and all who attend are sure to feel the presence of God in a powerful way."

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